5: Pipes S-4 (1953) 1955 RL1 Turkestan RL1

The population of the former[1] was traditionally nomadic, Turkish, and in religious matters fairly indifferent. Turkestan, on the other hand, being predominantly urban and agricultural, and inhabited by Iranians and considerably Arabicized and Iranicized Turks, was until the Soviet period one of the great centers of Islamic learning and practice. This difference between the religious background of the two regions must be kept in mind when studying contemporary Central Asian Muslims.

The most striking feature of the religious attitude of the Muslim refugees is their strong and articulate hostility toward all forms of established religion, including Islam. Time and again, the informants expressed the conviction that all religion is a form of superstition incapable of standing the test of "science," of serving society as a means of attaining social progress. The typical opinion ran as follows: "Yes, I believe in a Supreme Being, but it doesn't matter whether He is called Allah, God, Christ, or anything else. Nor does He care whether I pray or not. Religion is a superstition which keeps people backward. Look at the Arabs and Persians, where religion has gotten them: they are poor and ignorant. To achieve progress, we must not allow religion to interfere, though religion should not be persecuted because it does help some people in facing life." The general assumptions behind such reasoning are fairly obvious: the belief in a conflict between faith and reason, religion and science; a pragmatic, utilitarian scale of values; scepticism of certain aspects of religion, leading to a wholesale rejection of all religion.

In the long run, this attitude may well determine the whole future of Islam in Central Asia. The intelligentsia displays the same cult of reason, and of its concomitant, secular society, in an extreme, uncomprising way, as do the educated groups of other Asian societies. Here, as there, progress, the ultimate good, is conceived as incompatible with religion. Against such hostility to established religion the revival of Islam in its pre-1917 form, even under conditions of complete freedom, does not seem likely.

This conclusion is strengthened by the picture given of the religious practices of Central Asian Muslims. Islam in the Soviet Union has to operate under extremely difficult conditions, due in part to the specific repressive measures undertaken by the regime against religion, and in part to the general conditions of Soviet life. In the first category are the physical destruction of the Islamic leadership undertaken between 1927 and 1932 through the arrest and deportation of virtually all persons enjoying some religious status in the Muslim community, from the top hierarchy to the lowest village mullah; the closing of nearly all the village mosques and most of the city mosques; the threat of dismissal hanging constantly over every Soviet citizen in any position of responsibility if known to engage in religious practices; and the nearly complete suppression of all religious literature through the change of the native alphabets (from Arabic to

[1] [the northern half of Soviet Central Asia or Kazakhstan -- Analyst]